

# 'Persistence keeps us

## By Rick Pitino

*Rick Pitino, coach of the defending NCAA champion Kentucky Wildcats, is college basketball's best coach. But he owes his success, he says in his new book, Success Is a Choice, to basic principles that apply to all endeavors, from parenting to heading a corporation. At the start of the NCAA playoffs — this week through March 31 — Pitino explains his 10 steps to success, and reveals how he plans to handle the huge pressure he faces this month to stay on top.*

**1 THRIVE ON PRESSURE.** Stress robs us of our focus and inhibits our performance. Pressure is negative only when we are ill-prepared. In fact, pressure can bring out extraordinary accomplishments.

When senior Derek Anderson, our best player, went down with a season-ending knee injury in late January, our team was immediately faced with a great challenge.

So we had a choice. We could either find a way to deal with this adversity, or we could decide that our season was over and that, for this year at least, our dreams were beyond our reach.

The day after Derek was injured, I told the players that no one person could replace Derek Anderson. I told them that, in order to reach our dreams, each player would have to give 20 percent more, in terms of both effort and production. That was their challenge, and if they chose to accept it, then we as a group could still have a great season and have a chance to repeat as champions.

I'm proud to say that our team chose success. Several players have stepped up their games considerably, and all of us are battling through adversity by working harder than ever. To borrow an old adage: Beware of the wounded tiger.

*Especially if that tiger is highly motivated.*

**2 ESTABLISH GOOD HABITS.** A bad habit is any habit that doesn't serve you in a positive way. For example, common bad habits in the workplace include distractions (the personal calls that drag on, the conversations at the coffee machine that go past the second cup) and excuses ("Yes, I leave at 5, but so does everybody else"). Another bad habit is being on time. That's right: Coming to work on time is a bad habit. An athlete wouldn't show up for an 8 o'clock game at 7:55 and go out to play without warming up. Why should someone who is arriving at work

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**Great people, great teams and great companies have one common denominator: a work ethic that is second to none. As March Madness starts, legendary coach Rick Pitino reveals his 10 steps to success.**



**Inset: Pitino and his Kentucky Wildcats relish their 76-67 win over the Syracuse Orangemen in last April's NCAA championship game.**

# great'

at the appointed hour think he or she is prepared for the day? You should arrive a half-hour early, get your social conversations out of the way, get your newspaper read and get your coffee poured, so that when the workday starts you are ready.

Get organized. Don't put things off. Do the unpleasant things early, freeing yourself for what you enjoy.

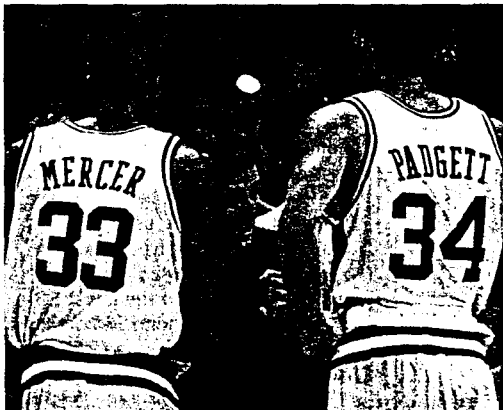
**3 MASTER THE ART OF COMMUNICATION.** In four words: Listen more, talk less.

**4 BUILD SELF-ESTEEM.** You have to feel good about yourself to succeed. The way to do that is to deserve success, to establish a great work ethic and the discipline inherent in that. But you also need to build the self-esteem of the people around you. Look at Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan. Their presence on the court raises everyone else's performance level.

Or take Anthony Epps, one of our starting point guards. Anthony probably was the least acclaimed of all our players coming into Kentucky. After last season, he had no motive to improve. He had won a state championship in high school and a national championship in college but didn't think he could play at the next level. "I guess I just don't have the skills," he said.

I then pointed out his skills, which include terrific guarding ability and the humility to sacrifice himself for the good of the team. In fact, the only things preventing him from playing in the NBA were that he was a little slow and lacked a quick first step.

"If I were you," I said, "I wouldn't be jealous of my teammates, because you certainly want to see them succeed. But I would want a piece of that, too. ... I would go out tomorrow and begin to do everything



Pitino directs his players in last month's game against Western Carolina, which Kentucky won by a score of 82-55. At press time, the Wildcats were No. 3 in the rankings.

humanly possible to improve my foot speed and my first step. I would see this as a golden opportunity. You have as much right to get to the NBA as anyone else on this team."

Anthony became a motivated player because he wanted to open doors in his future. Just watch him play this month. Everyone wants to believe that he or she has value, an important lesson if you are a parent, teacher, boss or coach.

**5 ALWAYS BE POSITIVE.** The rule is simple: The more trying the times, the more positive you have to be. Look at change as a chance to be more successful.

**6 LEARN FROM ADVERSITY.** At one time or another we all encounter adversity that threatens our will to go on. One kind of adversity occurs when you experience a major failure, the kind that leaves you doubting yourself. Then you have to step back, examine your role in the failure and accept your share of the blame. Another kind of adversity comes from events we can't control, personal tragedies. Then we either learn to overcome or we sink into despair.

In 1987, I learned this the hard way. My son Daniel had been born six months earlier with congenital heart problems. He was hospitalized for months, during which time my wife, Joanne, spent 14-hour days with him at the hospital, seven days a week. Finally, Daniel's condition improved and we took him home.

One day in March, I talked Joanne into taking a break and coming to New York with me for the Big East tournament. On the bus ride back, a state trooper pulled us over and told me to make an urgent call. The call was to the hospital, and a doctor there told me Daniel was dead.

Over the next few months there was not much to our marriage or family life. We had religious faith, but how would we ever be able to deal with something so traumatic? How could God do this to us? Well, God didn't do it. Life did. There are simply parts of life we can't understand. We knew we had to accept this and return to our lives. Joanne and I changed our attitude from pointless negativity to appreciation for the good we had. We turned our attention to our three sons and tried to do positive things in Daniel's name.

We must force ourselves to appreciate the good still around us; otherwise, the bad will ruin our lives.

**7 LEARN FROM ROLE MODELS.** The keys: Emulate traits you admire, and learn from others' mistakes.

**8 BE FEROCIOUSLY PERSISTENT.** Persistence, more than anything else, keeps us great. Anyone can be great for a day, a week, a month. But the people who ultimately succeed are the ones who understand that success is a long-term commitment. Look at writer Patricia Cornwell, who spent years at the typewriter

before she sold her first mystery novel, but who kept doggedly working at her trade until she became one of the hottest writers in the country.

You have to pay your dues. One day one of the Wildcats, Jamaal Magliore, had a bad game and failed to score. He was down the next day. "I don't understand," he said. "I should be doing better."

I pointed out that I had spent 15 years as a young coach, driving all day and all night to basketball camps or on scouting or recruiting trips, often in an ancient Renault Le Car I expected to fall apart on the road.

"I don't know why I did all that," I said. "I should have become coach of the New York Knicks when I was 22 and head coach at Kentucky when I was 24. I should have told people I didn't want to do all those things I did for 15 years. I don't know why I paid all those dues."

The point: Jamaal hasn't come near paying his dues, and until he does, he can't expect to succeed every night. Develop a "PHD" attitude: poor, hungry and driven, the kind of attitude that will drive you to learn more and be better.



Michael Jordan



Dennis Rodman

**Pitino on Jordan:** "He practices harder than anyone on the court. He expects to be successful because he has paid the price to be successful."

**And on Rodman:** Rodman may be eccentric, but "as a basketball player he realizes that rebounding is his strength, and everything he does on the court is geared to that."

**9 SET DEMANDING GOALS.** Most people, when presented with the fact that it takes hard work to be successful, will begin working harder. The difficult part is getting them to understand their weaknesses so they can frame their goals around fixing them.

Wayne Turner, a sophomore on the team, was a high school All-American. He played in a weak league where he averaged 40 points a game, mostly on taking the ball to the basket. Because he was able to do this easily, he rarely shot the ball from the perimeter; now this is the weakest part of his game.

Wayne had some serious shooting flaws when he arrived at Kentucky. He didn't see these as a problem, though, because he'd always been able to play to his strength. But as the competition got better, his weakness at shooting the perimeter shot became more pronounced. Now he realizes he must work at this part of his game if he is ever to become a great player. But that didn't start to happen until he finally admitted to himself his game had a weakness.

We all make excuses for our weaknesses, but if we don't conquer them one by one, they'll consume our time and energy and make us miss opportunities. We need goals that will help us overcome our weaknesses. Wayne's goal: a better perimeter shot. He just needs to put in the time and discipline.

**10 SURVIVE SUCCESS.** Today's success is often tomorrow's failure. A failure to maintain discipline causes it to evaporate immediately. It's that fragile. So never forget what you did right. Write down your own secrets to success. Study them. If nothing else, they'll remind you it wasn't good fortune that caused your success, but an entire lifestyle of achievement. ■